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ABSTRACT

To identify competencies necessary for state directors of special education, 66 competency statements in eight administrative categories were rated by a national sample of 128 state education agency personnel. Ss rated the amount of importance an "ideal" state director should place on each category and task and the importance actually placed on each item. Among findings were that state directors need improvement on 44 of the 66 competencies; that actual performance was rated higher on the lower priority categories; that the three greatest deficiency areas were evaluation, staff management, and development, and planning; and that state directors were rated better at special education tasks than general administrative tasks. Results had implications for the training and hiring of special education directors. (LS)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION, COMPETENCY, and the PROBLEM of ADMINISTRATION

BY

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Special education has been the object of a great deal of attention in recent years from all branches of federal and state governments, chief state school officers, the U.S. Office of Education, the judiciary, and significantly the Congress of the United States.

Despite definitive landmark "right to education" court decisions for the handicapped [1.] it is generally recognized that 50% - 60% of the nation's school age handicapped children are eigher not receiving special educational services, or are in programs that have been judged inadequate. Recent trends, however, indicapte that a new national conscience is emerging. Increasing amounts of monies from state legislatures, and more recently legislative allocations from the federal government are being channeled into state departments of education to improve existing special education programs and to provide programs where they are now non-existent. If proposed federal legislation (e.g. S6, HR 70) is approved and funded by the Congress, many state education agencies will face an unusual problem--that of managing significantly improved financial resources for the education of the handicapped. This would be catalytic in moving closer towards the USOE goal of "an appropriate education for every handicapped child by 1980".

Consequently, the question now arises: are state directors of special education and their staffs equipped and ready to successfully administer large amounts of tax dollars; and can these monies be translated into comprehensive and educationally accountable programs which reach out to those not currently receiving services, and to provide better services for those already in special education programs.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE, Inc.) in its efforts to strengthen special education units of state departments of education has been supported by the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in identifying inservice training needs of state directors so that training programs can be developed.

While state directors should be chosen on the basis of special training, experience, proven merit and leadership qualities, specific criteria for selection have never been clearly defined, and there is practically no research relating directly to the functions and competencies required of state directors.[2]

Thus the first step of NASDSE's proposed training program was conceived as the identification of competencies necessary for the state directorship. This would serve multi-purposes, with implications for state directors, university administrator training programs and state departments of education, as well as the NASDSE training project.

Purpose of the Study

With the above considerations in mind, this study was initiated for three basic purposes: to identify generic administrative tasks for the state directorship of special education, to rank the tasks in an administrative taxonomy, and to determine inservice training priorities so that competency-based training programs can be developed.

Review of Related Literature

Administration, as a theory or as a science, is still in its developmental stage.

Halpin's opinion (1966) on the "state of the art" seems still to be correct: "there does not exist today...a single well-developed theory of administration that is worth getting exticted about".[3] As a result, there is little agreement on the question of whether or not administration is a process, thereby requiring a "common core" of skills, or if administration requires specific skills indigenous to different institutional milieus. Recently, a synthesis of these views emerged, i.e., that there is a core of behaviors common to all administration, regardless of the substantive field of activity----business, hospital care, education, military, research and development, public administration-----which can be identified for preservice kinds of training, while specific functions and behaviors varying with different institutional environments are more suited for inservice and experiential kinds of training.

This study attempted, in part, to contribute to the discussion of common core vs. specific vs. a combination of administrative skills by inductively identifying and categorizing the tasks which state directors perform and determine inservice education needs of state directors.

Methodolgy

NASDSE involves state directors and members of their staff, large city special education directors, and a review of related state education agency (SEA) literature in generating a list of 69 state directors' tasks. These were rewritten as competency statements, and clustered into eight categories by a research technique known as latent partition analysis and multi-dimensional scaling analysis.[4]

The competency statements and the administrative categories were subsequently submitted to a national sample to rate the amount of importance an "Ideal" state director should place on each category and task.

The sample also rated the "Real", that is, the importance state directors actually place on each item. A five point (5-1) Likert scale was used, five being "very important" and one being "not important". This methodology was adapted from the procedures of Halpin (1966)[5], Cook and Van Otten (1972) [6], and Pol and Gale (1973). [7]

The sample included the following state education agency personnel:

	N
Supervisors of state directors	17
State Directors	23
Subordinates of state directors	88
Total	128

Means and Standard Deviations (SD) were the statistical calculations used to analyze the data. The mean was considered the index of importance----the higher the mean, the greater the importance and the higher the rank. The SD was the index of consensus; the lower the SD the greater the consensus. The first step was to compute the Mean and SD for all items on the Ideal and Real scales. The Ideal Mean was 3.76; its SD was .37. The Real Mean was 3.36; its SD was. 39.

Statements were ranked within each category accroding to their Mean scores. The Means ranged from 4.75 to 3.31.

To identify the training priorities form the competency statements the following statistical reationale was used:

First Priority training needs (N=19)

Those single statements whose "Ideal" mean scores were more than one SD above the "Ideal" mean for all items, but whose SD was at

or below the mean for all itmes were considered as "High Priority" training needs. These statemnts can be considered as "High Ideal, Low Real", and substantial emphasis needs to be placed on these tasks.

Second Priority Training Needs (N = 26)

Those "Ideal" scores which were less than a full SD above the Mean for all items and whose "Real" score was at or below the Mean for all items were considered as second priority training needs.

Maintenance Training Needs (N=21)

Those individiual statements whose "Ideal" and "Real" mean scores within one SD of the total means for all items were considered to be important tasks of state directors, and they are already placing adequate importance on them. Though these items do not need to be emphasized in an immediate training program, they are considered important tasks of state directors.

This statistical procedure allowed the objectives of the study to be met while providing data for subgroup comparisions of the performance (Ideal and Real) of state directors of special education.

Results

Results of the study were three fold: (1) generic tasks of the "Ideal" state directors of special education were identified and categorized; (2) the data allowed for easy derivation of the taxonomy of categories and tasks for state directors; and (3) and immediate generic inservice needs were identified.

Tables 1-8 display the administrative taxonomy for state directors of special education. Categories are listed in rank order according to the "Ideal" mean scores of the sample. Statements are then listed according to their rank within each category.. The Mean and SD score and overall rank for each statement is also shown. Astericks (*) beside the rank number indicate training items. Non-asterisked statements indicate maintenance items.

TABLE 1

STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #1:
COORDINATING (M=4.50)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N=66
* 1	Builds interpersonal communications to enhance group supportiveness	4.55	.66	14
** 2	Involves those affected by policies, etc. in their development	4.51	.79	18
** 3	Organizes and uses task forces, work groups, etc.	4.37	.80	34
* 4	Identifies social system factors which make for productive work	4.12	.96	52

* First priority training items = 2
** Second priority training items = 2

TABLE 2

STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #2
STAFF MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT (M=4.49)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N=66
* 1	Motivates staff	4.72	.56	2
* 2	Informs/involves staff	4.70	.62	4
3	Selects staff	4.62	.64	6
* 4	Evaluates individual staff performance	4.56	.70	11
** 5.	Orients new staff	4.50	.80	21
* 6	Communicates with staff Re: work/issues	4.46	.72	27
** 7	Provides recognition & rewards for staff, individually & collectively	4.45	.70	28
** 8	Uses unique interests and abilities of staff	4.31	.71	38
* 9	Conducts frequent well-organized meetings	4.30	.82	39
*10	Resolves conflicts	4.25	.93	44
*11	Helps staff attain own inservice training needs	4.24	.78	46
*12	Has plans to achieve short-term objectives	4.21	.75	49
13	Specifies job descriptions	4.20	.92	50
**14	Defines state director role	4.03	1.03	60
**15	Designs staff inservice programs	4.02	.84	61

* Frist priority training items = 8
** Second priority training itmes = 5

TABLE 3

*STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #3
FISCAL MANAGEMENT (M=4.48)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N=66
** 1	Determines fiscal impact of policy	4.47	.65	24
* 2	Determines cost-effectiveness of state programs	4.37	.83	31
3	Prepares SEA operating budget	4.34	.92	36
4.	Manages the special education budget	4.22	.96	47
5	Manages federal and state monies for state programs	4.06	1.03	55
6	Prepares program reports as required by agencies from which funds are obtained	4.04	1.03	58
7	Writes or coordinates the writing of proposals for federal and foundation aid	3.72	1.16	66

* Frist priority training items =1
** Second priority training items =1

TABLE 4

STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #4:
EVALUATION (M=4.45)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N = 66
*1	Appraises effectiveness of own leadership behavior	4.51	.68	17
*2	Maintains continuous evaluation process of state's programs	4.44	.91	29
*3	Both formatively and summatively monitors state's programs	4.32	.93	37
*4	Evaluates effectiveness of state's service delivery models	4.27	.91	42
*5	Involves concerned groups in evaluation of goals, strategies and program effectiveness	4.22	.81	48
*6	Evaluates degree of achievement of goals & objectives	4.17	.92	51
**7	Appraises effectiveness of teacher training programs.	4.02	.88	62

* First priority training items =6.
** Second priority training items =1.

TABLE 5

STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #5
PLANNING (M=4.43)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N = 66
**1	Uses a wide range of inputs in determining state programs	4.62	.60	7
**2	Establishes goals & priorities on the basis of state's philosophy, purpose& goals	4.61	.63	8
**3	Develops priority long and short range plans for program development	4.56	.74	10
**4	Develops a state plan for assessing sp. educ. services	4.56	.69	12
5.	Develops regulations for program management and delivery of services in the states	4.56	.70	13
6	Plans, organizes and implements conprehensive state programs	4.54	.76	15
*7	Uses rational decision-making models in managing procedures	4.54	.63	16
*8	Determines needs based on formal, on-going need assesment procedures	4.49	.78	22
**9	Uses technical management skills (PERT,MBO, etc.)	4.11	.87	54
**10	Assesses long range staffing needs of LEAs	3.84	1.03	64
**11	Develops instructional models for implementation in LEAs	3.79	1.00	65

* First priority training items =2
** Second priority training items =7

TABLE 6
STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #6
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (M=4.42)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N = 66
**1	Maximally utilizes fiscal agency, legal & personnel resources	4.69	.58	5
2	Periodically reviews & revises existing policies	4.50	.71	19
3	Interprets impact of legislation, Attorney General Opinions, and case law	4.50	.72	20
4.	Converts legislation into program standards & guidelines	4.48	.76	23
5	Converts "due process" court decisions into program policies	4.46	.72	25
**6	Converts program & service delivery concepts into model legislation	4.35	.78	35
7	Provides uniform descriptions of handicapping conditions to LEAs	4.28	.89	41
8	Reviews, approves, disapproves LEA proposals for funding	4.05	.99	57

* First priority training items = 0
** Second priority training items = 2

TABLE 7
STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #7
ORGANIZING (M= 4.35)

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N=66
**1	Uses appropriate state/ regional/federal resources in design and implementation of state programs	4.46	.79	26
**2	Determines the relationship of SEA untis with other SEA units and related agencies	4.25	.92	45
**3	Determines relationship of SEA unit with regional and national centers	4.12	.84	53
4	Defines role of support programs and uses competencies of medical practitioners, psychologists, therapists, etc.	3.99	.94	63

* First priority training items = 0
** Second priority training items = 3

TABLE 8

STATE DIRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVE TASK TAXONOMY CATEGORY #8:
COMMUNICATIONS : LOCAL AND NATIONAL

RANK WITHIN CATEGORY	TASK	IDEAL MEAN	SD	OVERALL RANK (IDEAL) N = 66
1	Influences state leadership and power sources to positive attitudes and actions toward special education	4.75	.50	1
2	Generates public acceptance and support of special education programs and services	4.70	.55	3
3.	Communicates with all directors of special education throughout the state	4.60	.58	9
**4	Communicates regularly with related agency heads	4.42	.65	30
**5	Communicates with all exceptional child-related organizations in state	4.37	.76	32
6	Advises groups on laws, regulations & guidelines relating to special educ.	4.37	.76	33
**7	Uses a variety of forms and national groups concerned with special education	4.29	.76	40
8	Participates in major state and national groups concerned with special educ.	4.27	.80	43
**9	Gives mass media presentations	4.05	.96	56
**10	Prepares periodic reports on "The state of the art" of special education services statewide	4.04	.93	59

* First priority training items = 0.
** Second priority training items =5.

TABLE 9

SUMMARY TABLE of TRAINING PRIORITIES by CATEGORY

RANK ORDER OF IMPORTANCE	CATEGORY ITMES N = 66	FIRST PRIORITY TRAINING NEEDS +		SECOND PRIORITY TRAINING NEEDS	PERCENTAGE OF CATEGORY ITEMS "Needing Improvement"
1	COORDINATING	4	2	2	100%
2	STAFF MANAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT	15	8	5	87%
3	FISCAL MANAGEMENT	7	1	1	28%
4	EVALUATION	7	6	1	100%
5	PLANNING	11	2	7	82%
6	PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT	8	0	2	25%
7	ORGANIZING	4	0	3	75%
8	COMMUNICATIONS 10	10	0	5	50%
	TOTALS	66	19	26	68%

+ Statements within each category

TABLE 9

SUMMARY TABLE of TRAINING PRIORITIES by CATEGORY

ITMES		FIRST PRIORITY TRAINING NEEDS +	SECOND PRIORITY TRAINING NEEDS	PERCENTAGE OF CATEGORY ITEMS "Needing Improvement"	MAINTENANCE ITEMS
TING	4	2	2	100%	0
NAGEMENT PMENT	15	[illegible]	5	87%	2
ANAGEMENT	7	1	1	28%	5
ON	7	6	1	100%	0
	11	2	7	82%	2
DEVELOPMENT	8	0	2	25%	6
NG	4	0	3	75%	1
ATIONS 10	10	0	5	50%	5
	66	19	26	68%	21

in each category

Discussion

The three purposes of this study were achieved: (a) state director tasks were identified, (b) these tasks were categorized and ranked according to importance, and (c) gaps between what ought to be (Ideal) and what is (Real) were noted to identify inservice training priorities.

Analysis of Tables 1-9 indicates the following conclusions:

1. The state directorship position demands a wide variety of competencies.

2. State Directors of special education need improvement on 44 of the 66 statements.

3. State Director performance (Real) was rated higher on the lower priority categories than on the higher priority categories.

4. The three greatest deficiency areas are (1) Evaluation, (2) Staff Management and Development, and (3) Planning. Tasks needing improvement in these categories account for 28 of the total of the 44 (65%) "need improvement" items.

5. Over two thirds of the tasks in the categories of Coordination, Organizing, and Communications, "need improvement".

6. The tasks of a state director of special education, to a greater or lesser degree, include all of the behavior involved in other administrative (common core) activities, plus behaviors specific to special education. Generally, state directors rated better at special education tasks than in the general administrative tasks.

Implications

The results and conclusions of this study have varied implications for different groups that have interest in the area of special education administration.

The training and experience background for the state director role should parallel that of the general administrator and include expertise in special education.

The data shows that state director deficiencies are mainly in the "common core" area of administrative activities while their strengths tend twoard activities involving skills and knowledge highly specific to special education. State directors should find the taxonomy a helpful criterion in determining and ranking their inservice training needs and as a criterion for measuring their job performance against generic standards.

SEAs should use this data in considering inservice staff development programs, in structuring job descriptions, in hiring personnel, and possibly for retention and promotion purposes. Universities which train educational administrators should examine this taxonomy and, where appropriate, insure that the "common core" skills are emphasized in their programs.

In addition, universitites should re-examine their traditional roles in preservice and inservice education. Since it is unrealistic to expect training institutions to produce finished products with all the necessary skills and knowledge requisite in operating educational programs, these institutions whould begin to assist individuals and professional groups to obtain needed continuous training experiences. This type of functioning would require crossing institutional lines and reaching out into the community and to professional associations. Other professional groups in need of delineating specific tasks of an occupational position should find the techniques of identifying and categorizing tasks and identifying inservice needs a valid, functional precedent to follow.

Conclusion

The future of providing special education services for handicapped children is bright. Recognition of due process, adequate funding, and improved educational

delivery systems will do much to ensure an appropriate education for every handicapped child. However, with this new recognition comes added responsibilities and accountabilities for those administering special education programs within the states. Hopefully, this study will aid in the design of systems to maintain and to improve the skills of incumbent and future special education administrators.

FOOTNOTES

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